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OPPRESSION AND CONTROL IN UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN FICTION

Abstract

The themes of oppression and control play a highly significant role in utopian and dystopian fiction which illustrates alternative world scenarios. These fictional social orders portray possible worse scenarios that might become the reality unless certain necessary measurements are taken. In these portrayals, individuality is suppressed for the alleged welfare of the society and the collective interests of a ruling body are accordingly highlighted. The aim of this study is therefore to discuss the representation of oppression and control in utopian and dystopian narratives through the analysis of the three selected speculative texts, namely *A Modern Utopia* by H. G. Wells, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell with specific references from relevant secondary sources.

Keywords: dystopia, oppression, George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, H. G. Wells

ÜTOPIK VE DISTOPIK KURGUDA TOPLUMSAL BASKI VE KONTROL

Öz

Toplumsal baskı ve kontrol temaları, alternatif dünya senaryolarını tasvir eden ütopyik ve distopyik kurguda oldukça önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu kurmaca toplumsal düzenler, gerekli önlemler alınmadığı takdirde ortaya çıkabilecek daha kötü olası senaryoları tasvir etmektedir. Bu eserlerde, bireysellik, bir toplumun sözde refahını sağlayabilmek adına bastırılabilir ve yöneten gücün kolektif çıkarlarına bu anlamda daha çok önem verilebilir. Bu çalışmanın amacı bu bağlamda, ütopyik ve distopyik anlatılarda toplumsal baskının ve kontrolün temsilini, çalışma kapsamında seçilmiş üç spekülatif metin olan H. G. Wells'in *A Modern Utopia*, Aldous Huxley'in *Cesur Yeni Dünya* ve George Orwell'in *Bin Dokuz Yüz Seksen Dört* eserlerinin konu ile alakalı ikincil kaynaklara göndermeler üzerinden yapılan analizi üzerinden tartışmaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: distopya, toplumsal baskı, George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, H. G. Wells

Introduction

Dystopian fiction illustrates alternative world scenarios that are relatively darker and more nightmarish as compared to the actual social order. In literary dystopias, oppression is an efficient means of restricting freedom, individuality, and controlling citizens in a totalitarian state that struggles to maintain its power through the loss of certain liberties such as freedom of expression, travelling, sexuality, reading, and education. Such fictional states may exercise cruelty, torture, and extreme punishment in order to keep their utmost power, whereas some other repressive states might practice different policies such as freedom of sexuality and the widespread use and distribution of certain drugs so as to protect and maintain their dominance in certain dystopian projections.

It is possible to come across such oppressive states in a dystopia, which is described as “a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand, or as a satire of utopian aspirations which attempts to show up their fallacies ... or ways of life we must be sure to avoid” (Claeys, 2010: 107). In a similar vein, Lyman Tower Sargent describes dystopia as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived” (1994: 9). As can be seen, dystopias, which “extrapolate from the socio-ecologically deficient present in order to demonstrate the horrors that might unfold without urgent and systematic fundamental transformations” depict a world that implicates a criticism of social and political problems in a society (Alberro, 2020). This illustration in a dystopian text, which may “confront and criticise practices such as the misuse of science and technology or, the belligerence of governments” demonstrates how the future might be unless certain measurements are taken (Kayıscı, 2014: 32).

Such a dystopian tendency emerged as a result of the abuse of technology, the experienced social and political problems in the society, and the fact that utopian ideals portrayed in earlier literary utopias failed to live up to the expectations. One significant function

of dystopia is in this respect to serve “as a prophetic vehicle, the canary in a cage, for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies” (Baccolini and Moylan, 2003: 1-2). In a similar vein, it is also possible to come across such a controlling state in a literary utopia. A utopian work offers an alternative world, allegedly a “better” one than the existing world which has social and political problems (emphasis added). Oppression and control thus play a crucial role in both dystopian and utopian fiction. This study will, therefore, seek to discuss the theme of oppression and control in the three selected fictional works, namely *A Modern Utopia* by H. G. Wells, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell with specific references to the primary sources and relevant secondary sources.

Oppression and Control in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction: *A Modern Utopia*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

H. G. Wells’ text, *A Modern Utopia* (1905) involves the theme of control and oppression, as there is a partial control over individuals, though not by violence. In this regard, there is a control of education in addition to the strict rules in this dynamic, kinetic utopia. The society is organized according to four classes of mind, namely the Poietic, the Kinetic, the Dull, and the Base. Well’s *A Modern Utopia* presents a seemingly utopian world; however, it still includes a controlling ruling body in order to maintain its power and control.

The rigid classification of society into four classes of mind restricts social mobility because individuals are grouped according to their capabilities and abilities. For instance, Poietic minds are referred to as the creative class with their imaginative power to create. They bring scientific and technological discoveries into that society. All the religious ideals and beauties are linked with this class. Likewise, Kinetic minds are referred to as capable, clever, more moral, and reliable than the Poietic. These two classes can be “associated with a good or bad physique, with excessive or defective energy, with exceptional keenness of the senses in some determinate direction” (Wells, 2005: 173).

However, the depiction of the Dull changes radically since they do not have sufficient imagination and cannot learn thoroughly. They are referred to as “persons of altogether inadequate imagination, the people who never seem to learn thoroughly, or hear distinctly, or think clearly” (Wells, 2005: 174). Lastly, the Base have “a narrower and more persistent egoistic reference than the common run of humanities . . . relatively great powers of concealment, and they are capable of, and sometimes have an aptitude and inclination towards, cruelty” (Wells, 2005:174). Such classification demonstrates that Wells places people into fixed categories and attributes certain essentialist properties to these different classes of mind, which can project how the control of population exists in Wells’ utopia.

In addition, the rules of the *samurai*, the administrative unit reflect how the State has strict control over these volunteers. Therefore, the State becomes controlling and manipulative, as the samurai are engaged with administrating the State and responsible for the rule of the world. Head teachers, judges, barristers, employers, medical men, and legislators must be, accordingly, *samurai*. However, the Dull and the Base are excluded from this group, which shows how the State excludes certain groups while incorporating some other groups in order to maintain its power and rule. The *samurai* cannot buy or sell drugs; cannot be hotel-keepers, hotel proprietors, hotel shareholders, barbers, inn waiters, boat cleaners, and servant; cannot act, sing or recite; must shave and dress properly; must bathe in cold water; must read aloud from

the Book of the Samurai for at least ten minutes every day; and have a particular dress. These strict rules and control demonstrate the dominating control of the State over individuals since the *samurai* cannot behave outside the limits of their predestined roles.

In a similar light, since the education of children reveals the children's importance for the State, the State controls the growing process of children. However, in this case, children are not taught the hatred of flowers or books as in *Brave New World*, but, rather, they are brought up in a way to serve the welfare of the society. The State attaches great significance to the future since "the increasing control of a child's welfare and upbringing by the community, and the growing disposition to limit and tax inheritance" are "the duty and moral meaning of the world community as a whole" (Wells, 2005: 66). Wells hereby shows how the power and control of the State can be used in a manipulative manner. The connection between the community, the State, and children is illustrated through "surveillance and disposition of population" since children will be the adults of tomorrow (Rayward, 1999: 568). As can be seen, although Wells does not draw a completely pessimistic world in his seemingly utopian text, it is still possible to observe certain restrictions and control mechanisms in his *A Modern Utopia*.

Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), the second text within the context of this study, presents a utopian/dystopian world, in which individuality is oppressed although violence, punishment, and torturing, the conventional methods of repression in dystopian fiction, are not used to oppress individuals. It is through the freedom of sexuality and the frequent use of soma that the totalitarian state maintains its power in Huxley's work. It starts in A. F. 632 that stands for After Ford. This world has T as the symbol, which represents the model T Ford. Thus, people in this world worship Henry Ford that is the one to have produced the first automobile in the assembly line, replacing religion and religious figures. Fordism in Huxley's text represents "the subordination of humanity to the machine and to the scientific ideal" (Claeys, 2010: 115).

Furthermore, people in the New World are divided into five categories in *Brave New World*, namely Alphas (concerned with intellectual activity), Betas, Gammas, Deltas, and, Epsilons (hard labour, physical activity). It is expressed that these groups are happy to be what they are since there is no chance to change their position, which demonstrates how the State oppresses people into certain molds and does not give a chance. Their position is predestined. This classification accordingly restricts human possibility and capability.

In Huxley's text, strict birth control reflects the oppressive nature of the State because people are controlled all throughout their lives. There is predestination as to what group one will belong to before he or she is born, as they are produced in the hatcheries with the method of Bokanovsky. Thus, everything is fixed for the individuals. The system is extremely rigid although it seems flexible with the encouragement of sex, abundance of food, and the use of soma. It is not possible for the groups to go beyond the limits of their class since there is "no intelligence needed for an Epsilon because they do not need anything but powerful bodies" (Abanazir, 1985: 24). Twelve World Controllers are in control of this breeding system, which adds to the suppressive nature of the State. Children are brought up collectively and "behavioural manipulation is elevated to a highly refined science" in addition to the fact that "the past has been erased" (Claeys, 2010: 115).

In this respect, stability is what matters for the State. Therefore, it should be maintained regardless of the loss of individuality since the welfare of the community is more important.

Mustapha Mond, the Resident World Controller of Western Europe, comments on this aspect as follows:

You can't make flivvers without steel- and you can't make tragedies without social instability. The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave. (Huxley, 2004: 193-94)

As can be inferred from these remarks, the State is not interested in individuality. Rather, it is the communal interest that matters to the State which encourages consumerism with its following motto: "Ending is better than mending. The more stitches, the less riches" (Huxley, 2004: 42). In this regard, individuals are constantly offered temporary pleasures like soma and sex. For instance, when a woman has sexual intercourse with a man for two months like Lenina, it is not considered "normal" because the individual should not feel attached to someone in order not to forget the interest of the State (emphasis added).

Hypnopaedia or sleep-teaching and Neo-Pavlovian conditioning are two other important means of oppressing individuals, restricting their lives, and brainwashing them in order not to breach the rules of the totalitarian State. Sleep-teaching is when all these groups are conditioned and taught slogans and the limits of their position. Moreover, conditioning deters children from nature and books (through explosions, bells). It turns out that children cannot touch or smell flowers, which actually adds to their mechanized condition. It is stated that "at the approach of the roses, at the mere sight of those gaily-coloured imaged of pussy and cock-a-doodle-doo and baa-baa black sheep, the infants shrank away in horror" because "[b]ooks and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks – already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked" (Huxley, 2004: 17). This process causes them to grow with "an instinctual hatred of books and flowers" (Huxley, 2004: 17). Accordingly, the link with nature and books is suppressed.

Freedom of sexuality is in this regard a means of keeping individuals under constant control. When sex does not satisfy them, soma is given to these individuals. Showers argues that this world turns people into "mindless, overly-sexualized machines" (2010: 81). Similarly, marriage is not allowed in *Brave New World*. Individuals laugh at words like mother, father, and son, as they do not exist in their mindset, and are therefore not accepted. Thus, people cannot connect to each other emotionally. Accordingly, there is no familial relationship. The Savage, John finds himself in a mocked position when he calls Linda "mother" in *Brave New World* because "the New world suppresses any kind of emotional activity, believing it to be a source of instability" (DeVido, 2012: 63).

Therefore, individuals are motivated to have sexual intercourse with different individuals, which is to prevent emotional bonds among citizens. "Sexual promiscuity" is presented as the norm in the New World and is a means of oppression (Claeys, 2010: 115). Lenina and Bernard, an Alpha plus, who go the Savage Reservation together, do not completely conform to the system as they have feelings; however, in the end, the System exiles Bernard and Helmholtz, which restores the totalitarian order. John is oppressed and exterminated by the System itself in

the end because John is humiliated by other citizens that watch him while whipping himself, and finally commits suicide, which reflects the victory of the State over the individual.

Thus, it is possible to argue that Huxley's *New World* turns out to be a totalitarian one although it does not apply violence, punishment, or torture because it creates illusionary happiness and temporary pleasures through the freedom of sexuality and soma. Whenever individuals have difficulty and a problem, they are recommended to take soma: "And if anything should go wrong, there's soma" (Huxley, 2004: 194). Hence, Huxley's dystopia keeps the citizens under constant control and surveillance like Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which Schmerl explains as follows: "Totalitarianism, real or fantastic, seems to engender two kinds of servility: the servility of fear, strikingly portrayed in Orwell's *1984*; and an unconscious, even a happy servility, perfected by the methods of population production" (1962: 332).

Unlike Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) presents an extremely totalitarian state, in which there is no room for thinking, writing, and sexuality since freedom is oppressed completely. Orwell's text, which "adheres to the typical narrative of dystopian fiction focusing on the growing alienation of an individual protagonist or small group of individuals who begin to rebel against prevailing conditions" depicts a rather somewhat pessimistic world where everything is watched by the state through technological developments such as telescreen and helicopters (Stock, 2019: 7). Citizens are kept under constant surveillance by the Inner Party and Big Brother, which is similar to the panopticon and creates paranoia. Individuals who attempt to violate the rules and orders of the State are oppressed, tortured, exterminated or "rehabilitated" because individuality emerges as the enemy of the State since individuals should conform to the expectations of the State without questioning (emphasis added). In this way, they are taught to love the State by applying electroshock and some other torturing strategies.

The Party in Oceania has the utmost control in the State and controls history by distorting the historical documents and by faking the photographs, newspapers, and even language in order to create a new language, *Newspeak*, which aims to bar rebellion by erasing all the words that may trigger revolt from the memory. Furthermore, the Party does not want individuals to think critically because critical thinking promotes observing, questioning, and criticizing the wrongs of the society and the State, which leads to the creation of a word, *thoughtcrime*. In this respect, Thought Police catches the individuals who attempt to think and write, the example of which is the protagonist Winston Smith, who works for the Ministry of Truth, as he tries to infringe the oppressive rules such as keeping a secret diary. However, he fails and is re-created in a way so as to become "an individual" loving Big Brother and conforming to the Party (emphasis added).

As can be seen, the oppressive state does not tolerate thinking and shatters *Oldspeak* replacing it with the new one, *Newspeak*, which is "made up of shortened and combined words, like Ingsoc, Miniluv, sexcrime and thoughtcrime" (Abanazir, 1985: 47). It aims at exterminating defying words and "purifying" the language in order to serve the State with total devotion (emphasis added). Syme touches on the efficiency of *Newspeak* that prevents thinking as follows: "Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thought-crime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it" (Orwell, 2017: 83-4). This aim renders thoughtcrime almost impossible since there are no longer words to express certain thoughts.

His following remarks in this regard represent the fixity of the new language: “Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten” (Orwell, 2017: 84). Thus, it is possible to argue that the State creates a highly suppressive world with its new language that does not allow individuals to communicate their thoughts and feelings in a free manner since it is strictly arranged, shaped, and manipulated. In the end, language becomes merely the voice of the State, that is Ingsoc: “Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak” (Orwell, 2017: 84).

Furthermore, the use of telescreen and helicopters is crucial in watching and designating individuals who commit thoughtcrime because thinking is strictly forbidden. It is stated that one’s thoughts are never entirely his/her own, which draws attention to the functional role of the relationship between discourse and power in shaping individuals in a society, as the individual is “carefully fabricated in it according to a whole technique of forced and bodies” (Foucault, 1977: 217). It is severely punished when caught. Winston, the member of the Ruling Party in Oceania, is not a totally submissive character at the beginning of the book and keeps a diary, in which he writes down his thoughts and feelings in a free manner.

His blooming revolutionary thoughts are put down in this diary since he writes about freedom, the corruption of the system, and Julia. He comments on the notion of freedom in his diary as follows: “Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus makes four. If that is granted, all else follows” (Orwell, 2017: 128). This freedom is denied to citizens by the State that oppresses its own individuals in order to make them accept its own twisted episteme. Thus, power produces its own regime of truth in this totalitarian system through propaganda, hate week, media, and television. These following statements can in this regard summarize the oppressive nature of the State in the book: “War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength” (Orwell, 2017: 164). Thinking is not permitted or encouraged in Oceania, which is at war with Eurasia or Eastasia. Instead, slavery, war, and ignorance are imposed as the “ideals” within the internal mechanics of this oppressive state (emphasis added).

In a similar vein, sexuality is also strictly forbidden. In this regard, individuals should not spend their energies with sexuality, but use their energies in order to serve the State instead. Winston and Julia have several secret sexual intercourses in a garden and in a room in the prole district, as the Party does not intervene in the prole district. However, they are ultimately caught by the police. This means that they have violated the rules of the State. The Party’s purpose is “to remove all pleasure from the sexual act” and “to kill the sex instinct, or, if it could not be killed, then to distort it and dirty it” (Orwell, 2017: 104-5).

Sexuality is oppressed because it is against the State that is against individual pleasures. Sex instinct creates a world of its own that is outside the Party’s control. Therefore, it needs to be destroyed when caught. Julia explains why the Party forbids sexuality as follows: “When you make love, you’re using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don’t give a damn about anything. They can’t bear you to feel like that. They want you to be bursting with energy all the time” (Orwell, 2017: 209-10). Sex stands for freedom and is linked to human nature; therefore, this instinct is suppressed and killed. Harold J. Harris comments on the representation of sexuality in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as follows: “[M]arriage for love is ruled out, artificial insemination officially backed, and complete sexual celibacy is encountered by one of the Party’s numerous organisations” (1959: 158). As can be understood, the Party bans any liberating actions, thoughts, and feelings, and subsequently oppresses such realms of freedom.

Thus, it is possible to state that Orwell's dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which gives the opportunity "to observe carefully how and in what ways endeavours can result in failure," depicts a totalitarian state that does not tolerate or welcome individuality, free thought, and sex (Tan, 2020: 303). Its plot focuses on "the revolt of an intellectual of the Outer Party" (Lowenthal, 1969: 169). The Party organizes hate weeks; uses television for propaganda; brainwashes its citizens; and forbids coffee, real sugar, proper white bread, and jam. The Party has spies and informants in order to get informed about thoughtcrime and rebellions such as O'Brien, a member of the Inner Party, who acts like a real friend to Winston. He gives Winston the rebellious leader of The Fabulous Brotherhood Emmanuel Goldstein's book, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, which seems to rebel against the state, but it is actually written by O'Brien himself to reveal and to catch thought criminals. In the end, Winston's mind is "warped, his soul forlorn, and his ability to express individuality is extinguished by The Party" (DeVido, 2012: 102).

In this respect, Syme is reported by the children. Similarly, Winston is reported by the shop owner in the prole district, an act of thoughtcrime, which O'Brien witnesses. This leads Winston to be subject to brutal torturing in Room 101, which ultimately causes Winston to accept, "2 + 2 = 5" (Orwell, 2017: 440). O'Brien's following comments on the Party demonstrate how oppression functions for the Party: "We control life, Winston, at all levels . . . We create human nature . . . Humanity is the Party. The others are outside – irrelevant!" (Orwell, 2017: 405-6). Hence, it is the world of the Party and Big Brother presented in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by Orwell that controls life in Oceania. Winston is eventually made to become a part of this suppressive world by being made to love Big Brother through the exercise of oppression and control.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that Wells' *A Modern Utopia*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* criticize the ill-functioning aspects of the existing society either by representing a pessimistic and bitter future influenced by the extreme use of technology and the scientific, social, and political developments to the benefit of the totalitarian states like Oceania in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that uses violence, propaganda, hate weeks, torture, and punishment in order to maintain its power, and the New World in *Brave New World* that promotes and encourages the freedom of sexuality, the daily use of soma, and the abundance of goods, in which case individuals are oppressed without the use of violence, or retribution.

However, both states turn out to be highly totalitarian, oppressive, and controlling. In a similar vein, Wells' *A Modern Utopia*, on the other hand, represents a seemingly utopian world, but the State turns out to be controlling and oppressive for the alleged welfare of the society in such cases as the education of children, the rules of the *samurai*, and population control. Thus, individuality is oppressed and controlled either completely or partially by these totalitarian and controlling ruling bodies in dystopian fiction in order to maintain their power and dominance, as demonstrated through the critical discussion of the three selected works within the context of this study.

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